Grandpa Patrolled No-Fly Zone

IN HIS LATER YEARS, my grandpa's one mission in life, I believe, was to kill every fly on the face of the Earth.

James Townsend spent most of his summer evenings sitting in a vinyl chair out on his front porch in Peru, Indiana. I often sat nearby in the "visitor" chair

He would come out of the house, reach up into the porch rafters and pull down an old flyswatter and place it near his chair. With feet up, he sat telling stories and drinking tea.

He'd turn his head toward me while he talked, but his eyes were always darting around the porch as he searched for man's worst enemy.

When a fly landed within reach, Grandpa would snatch the swatter from its perch quicker than John Wayne had ever drawn a gun in the Westerns that we used to watch together on Saturday afternoons.

Wham! Thousands of flies fell each summer as Grandpa rained deadly blows on them.

As I got older, I'd stand on the vinyl chair, reach up in the rafters and pull down my own flyswatter. I could never swat every fly within reach, no matter how hard I tried.

We'd sit there together, swatting flies and talking about what life was like when Grandpa was my age.

One day, Grandpa asked me if I'd like to see a trick. When a fly landed on his leg, he began to blow gently on it. I could see the fly's wings spread as it hunkered down against the wind.

Grandpa reached into his pocket and pulled out a well-worn barlow knife, opened the smaller blade and quickly jabbed it toward the fly. Got it!

I asked him to teach me the trick, but he refused. When I asked why, he explained.

“When I was your age, my father showed me the same trick, and I asked him to do it one more time,” he said.

“He waited until a big horsefly landed on his leg. He was so excited about the size of the fly that he didn’t pay attention to what he was doing,” Grandpa chuckled.

“Dad cut the fly in half, but drove the blade into his thigh,” Grandpa continued. “I won’t repeat that trick because I’ve always been afraid of making his mistake.”

A few years later, my grandpa’s flyswatter fell silent, and I’m sure flies everywhere celebrated.

Now I often find myself on the front porch swatting flies and telling stories to my daughter, but I’ve never attempted the knife trick.

By Charles Alan Sutton, Peru, Indiana